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MINISTRY PAPER NO. 48

Assistance from Public Funds to Citizens who have  
given Distinguished Service to the  
Community

Government has recently been considering the case of men and women in the community who have devoted their efforts and talents to the uplift and benefit of their fellow citizens with little concern for personal gain and who in the later years of their life are reduced to circumstances of actual need.

2. It is a feature of our society in Jamaica of which we can be proud that private citizens in all walks of life have given their time and energy to work of this kind, making a distinguished and valuable contribution to the enrichment of our national life. Most of these men and women when they come to the end of their active years have a pension or income of some kind, or have managed by some means to provide for their own support. Occasionally, however, it is found that one or another such distinguished citizen retires without the means to maintain himself at the standard of living to which he is accustomed - sometimes without an income of any sort.

It would be unfortunate indeed if such citizens were allowed to spend the rest of their lives in actual want. Yet it would be difficult to organise purely voluntary contributions from the rest of the community towards their upkeep. Government, therefore, regards it as reasonable that such persons should be afforded a measure of assistance from public funds. The House of Representatives is accordingly invited to agree that compassionate grants should be made from public funds towards the maintenance of persons in civil life who have made substantial contributions to the benefit and welfare of their fellow citizens and who on retirement are found in circumstances of need.

3. The possibility of establishing a fund from which such grants would be made has been examined but abandoned, and it is proposed instead that an annual provision should be made in the Budget, the grants to be administered by a committee established for this purpose. It is proposed that the committee should consist of four Members of the House of Representatives together with an equal number of prominent private citizens with one of the Members of the House as Chairman.

4. The grant to the distinguished citizen would take the form either of a lump sum payment, or an annuity or monthly allowance according to his circumstances. Grants could also be made to the dependants of such distinguished citizens. No one would ordinarily be eligible for a grant, however, who is receiving a pension or other superannuation allowance from public funds or who has not reached the age of 60 years.

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5. It would be left to the Committee, which might be named "The Citizens Distinguished Service Grants Committee", to lay down the criteria by which distinguished service shall be identified and eligibility for assistance determined. It is Government's view, however, that the standards should be high and that ordinarily no more than 4 or 5 grants should be made by the Committee each year.

6. It is suggested that payment of the grants should be made by the Accountant General and that the Secretary to the Committee should be a member of the staff of the Accountant General's Department. The application for assistance would be submitted to the Committee through the Secretary on a prescribed form and should be certified by prominent members in the community, if possible connected in some way with the sphere of activity in which the distinguished citizen had made his contribution to the national life. The circumstances of the applicant would be investigated by the Secretary of the Committee with the help of other agencies such as the Board of Supervision. The applicant would be expected to assist the committee by making available such information as is required about his past activities and his present circumstances in order to enable the eligibility for assistance to be judged.

7. The House is now invited, therefore -

- (a) to approve the proposal that compassionate awards should be made to distinguished citizens on the basis outlined in this paper;
- (b) to appoint a chairman and members of the committee; and
- (c) to agree that annual provision should be made in the Budget of a vote from which the grants will be made, and to agree that the provision for 1961/62 should be £2,000.

8. A Resolution seeking the approval of the House to these proposals will be moved by me in due course.

V. L. ARNETT  
Minister of Finance  
15th December, 1960.